

# **What You Should Know About Mississippi Medicaid**

**By: Governor Haley Barbour**

If you or someone you love depends on Medicaid, you should read this. And even if you do not need Medicaid, you are still paying for its services through your tax dollars and you should read this, too.

Mississippi Medicaid is one of the fastest-growing programs in the country. It doubled in cost in just five years. The growth is so rapid it is threatening to consume Mississippi's spending on other priorities like education.

To try and save the program that serves one out of every four Mississippians, the Legislature passed a good plan last year that moved 6% of all Medicaid recipients to the federal Medicare program for health care coverage because they were eligible for both programs. Despite the fear-mongering spread by some, this was a safe and comparable coverage alternative for those recipients. But that sound reform was stopped by a federal court before it could be implemented and save Mississippi \$100 million.

By the end of last year, the suspension of that reform combined with an accounting error from the previous administration helped

contribute to a \$268 million deficit that had to be filled or the program would shut down by March 11.

Though the deficit was announced in December, by last week the Legislature had still not acted and Medicaid was about to go broke. So to save Medicaid, I called a Special Session over the weekend. Thankfully, the Legislature answered my call and filled the deficit in just two days by taking money from the Health Care Trust Fund – the only place with enough money to fund that kind of deficit.

With the short-term emergency averted, the House and Senate are considering a plan to save more than \$166 million in Medicaid to help keep the program from going broke in future years. The Senate has passed it, but the House has refused.

As these budgeting efforts continue, my administration is doing something that has never been done before in the history of Medicaid. We are conducting face-to-face interviews with Medicaid recipients to check eligibility so we can remove people from the rolls who do not deserve benefits. This will make sure that taxpayer dollars are only going toward helping the truly needy.

Medicaid is finally changing for the better, but our work is not finished. Despite the out-of-control growth in Medicaid, there are some who reject reforming Medicaid and simply want to pump even more money into it. In other words, if Medicaid were a broken-down car, their answer is just to put more gas in it.

Raising taxes is not the solution for the Medicaid mess because taxpayers are not the reason for the Medicaid mess. Tax revenue coming in to the state has increased 34% in recent years, but spending has shot up 50% at the same time. Taxpayers have done their part, but state leaders haven't done theirs.

Medicaid needs more reform, not more revenue. Whether it is taxes on smokers or somebody else, any extra revenue generated by tax hikes will only give those in Jackson another excuse to spend more and put off enacting needed changes in our Medicaid program.

I hope all Mississippians will join me in the coming months to recreate a Medicaid program in our state that is efficient to providers, affordable to taxpayers, compassionate to the sick and only available to Mississippi's truly needy.

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